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August 10, 2010

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SUPERVISOR RIDLEY-THOMAS CALLS FOR SWEEPING REFORMS TO BETTER COORDINATE AND INTEGRATE SERVICES FOR YOUTH UNDER THE CARE OF THE L.A. COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

Among the concerns is the lack of nutritional care to youth in custody

LOS ANGELES – Continuing his mission to protect youth temporarily housed at Los Angeles County Probation Department juvenile hall and camp facilities, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas today proposed separate measures to better coordinate services and restore public confidence in the system.

Having had first hand knowledge after several unannounced visits to juvenile hall and camp facilities to support his concerns, the Supervisor's proposals are part of his ongoing efforts to reform the Department by engaging parents, educators and other stakeholders concerned about the care of youth in the system.

In the first of two proposals, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas would direct the County's Chief Executive Officer to work with various County Departments to better coordinate and monitor services by developing and implementing a single, comprehensive memorandum of understanding (MOU). The departments include County Counsel, Probation, Mental Health, Health Services, Public Health (DPH), Social Services and Children and Family Services.

Multiple experts recommend that local governments should develop and implement an MOU across the various county departments.

"What we have now is patchwork of multiple MOUs and interagency funding agreements which cover a myriad of health and social service needs," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. "These multiple MOUs lack anything unifying mission, purpose or overarching strategic goals."

For example, existing MOUs include the U.S. Department of Justice MOU between the Departments of Mental Health, Probation, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and Juvenile Court health services. The Departments of Probation and Mental Health have two separate MOUs regarding Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention funding and Youthful Offender Block Grant funds.

Streamlining multiple MOUs would enable the County to better coordinate and monitor the quality and scope of services, determine whether gaps exist, achieve efficiencies, and align already-funded services toward an effective strategy to improve care.

The CEO will return in 30 days with a written report to the Board that includes a description of the currently provided cross-agency services and a timeline for creating a comprehensive MOU.

The report will also include MOU performance benchmarks by which the County can measure and report upon its success, a prioritized list of evidence-based strategies to improve the quality of services for children in detention or at risk, and will ensure continuity of care as youth transition back to the community.

Providing Nutritional Care to Youth in Custody

In the second of his two motions -- outlining his concerns that the Probation Department may not be complying with a state law that requires all juvenile detention halls and camps to meet minimum requirements regarding diets, food service plans, and medical diets -- Supervisor Ridley-Thomas called for the CEO and Probation Chief to report back in a month with a plan to ensure that further violations of state nutritional requirements immediately cease.

The Department of Public Health is charged with monitoring compliance of state nutrition laws. Despite this fact, every one of the juvenile detention halls and all but one of the camps have repeatedly violated these nutritional requirements by failing to provide a minimum diet, medical diets prescribed for youth, an approved food services plan or menu, the proper portion of food to meet the caloric intake requirements, and failing to ensure that meals do not contain too much dietary fat.

"The Board has adopted various policies that encourage and ensure the County is engaging in optimal nutrition practices at all County operated or sponsored programs serving infants and children. The juvenile detention halls and camps should be no exception," the Supervisor said.

Among the items to be included in the report are how much is spent on food per meal, per detained youth, an explanation of the cost variance between facilities, if any, and a written corrective action plan to ensure that any violations of state nutritional requirements at Probation halls and camps will immediately cease.

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